

DEFINITIONS

Cognitive Limitations:

cognition> 1) the act or faculty of apprehending, knowing, or perceiving.

2) something known or perceived, a perception.

>L co—together

(g) noscere _know

limitations> limit n 1) a boundary enclosing a specified area.

3) the utmost point, degree, or extent beyond which something no longer functions, avails, etc.: to reach the limit of one's patience.

Relationship:

relation> 5) p1 the contacts or dealings between or among individuals, groups..
.etc.

6) the act of relating or narrating; also, that which is related or told.

Professional: adj.1)

connected with, preparing for, engaged in, appropriate, or conforming to a profession:
professional courtesy; professional skill.

Parent: nl) a father or a mother.

3) a source or wellspring; basis; cause

The New International Webster's Pocket
Dictionary of the English Language
2000 edition.

ASSESSMENT

1. No magic formula
2. Informal observation
3. Ongoing gathering information
 - a. Their background/historical information (where/how they grew up, were parented.
 - b. Effects of growing up with a disability
 - c. Poverty
 - d. Powerlessness/devalued because of disability and poverty (society)
 - e. Unsafe living conditions
 - f. Culture
 - 1) Time
 - 2) Family
 - 3) Living Arrangements
 - g. Present family dynamics
 - h. Coping with daily stress
 - i. Other community resources
4. Positive changes/growth
 - a. Family more receptive to assistance
 - 1) Previously viewed as uncooperative, no-show
 - b. Change in affect and behavior over time
 - 1) Improved physical appearance/children's hygiene
 - 2) Show sense of humor
 - 3) More assertive
 - 4) Improved social skills
 - 5) Self-esteem (value themselves), take time for themselves
 - 6) Improved parent/child interactions
 - 7) Children more affectionate, less fearful

A SENSITIVE APPROACH

(Will help families grow, increase their self-esteem and reduce your burnout)

Beginning the relationship/developing trust

1. Takes time
2. Nonjudgmental
 - a. Not critical
 - b. Not blaming
 - c. Not giving advice
3. Active listening/emphatic/supportive
4. Be direct/honest
 - a. "I" statements
 - b. If not, will erode relationship
 - 1) Parent knows
 - 2) You become resentful/angry
5. Set clear boundaries (not become a function)

Developing Goals

1. Partnership with family
 - Decide together Important to the family (sees the importance) Final decision theirs
2. Set realistic goals
 - Don't set up for failure Can the family do? Do they need ongoing support to be successful? Do they need the service provided?
3. Use family's/individual's strengths
4. Don't take over
 - Empower Use and develop natural supports
5. Be flexible
 - Deal with crises or what's on their mind Don't become frustrated if plans change-burnout
6. Acknowledge when don't agree
 - Talk about Use as learning experience Okay to disagree
7. Don't make decisions for them, even when they ask Help evaluate pros and cons
- 8 Set clear limits on what you will and will not do
- 9 Share your experience
 - Admit mistakes
10. Use humor
11. Give lots of positive feedback
12. Use lots of hands-on demonstration and modeling Teach Check for understanding Change attitudes
13. Work on developing more positive parent/child interactions before child management. Point out positive in children Empathize difficult to parent Explain/ demonstrate how play is children's work (learn through play) Realistic expectations for child's developmental level
14. May need assistance to keep appointments
 - Don't view as noncompliant May need reminders: Call ahead, Calendar

LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES CONTRIBUTING TO PROBLEMS PARENTING

Poverty: This is a major problem for many families. Often the bills exceed the amount of income available to a family. Parent's energy and limited resources go into meeting their children's basic physical need for food, clothing, and shelter. Affordable housing is limited and therefore parents are often faced with living in inadequate homes.

Unemployment: Parents often lack vocational training as well as necessary skills to get and maintain a job. Many jobs also do not build self-esteem.

Limited extended family and social supports: Most social skills are learned through social interaction and contact. As a result developing supports with friends, family, and service providers may be limited. Individuals may not have been taught to seek out needed services or develop friendships.

Apathy: Self esteem is likely to be affected as a result of limited success in school, work, and peer relationships.

Lack of normal living experiences in their own childhood: Childhood experiences may have been dampened by abuse, neglect, placement in group homes or the foster care system where emotional needs may not have been met. The lack of "normal" living experiences growing up in a loving caring supportive environment can have many affects. These parents often lack positive parenting role models.

Lack of stability in living arrangements, family or job situations: People with cognitive limitations, like others in the lower socioeconomic bracket, generally tend to move frequently, work in lower paying jobs with layoffs. Many mothers are either unmarried, separated or divorced.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS THAT MAY CONTRIBUTE TO DIFFICULTIES

Difficulty learning parenting skills and applying new skills in general. They may have had limited success in school and feel negative about learning. Be aware of how information is shared, how concrete is info, is info at parent's reading level.

A tendency to over generalize instructions. Once given a instruction it is always approached the same way.

Difficulty following complex directions, and modifying directions, if needed. Relates to above as well. Parent may hear one specific word and focus on it and not other parts of direction that may be more or as important.

Problems with long and short term memory. An example of this is how much and how often to feed their infant.

Difficulty in correctly recognizing cues and responding to the child. Nonverbal communication and cues can communicate so very much.

Limited awareness in recognizing problems and in problem solving. Assistance is needed to break down task or problem to make it more recognizable.

“Splinter skills.” Parents may have different levels of ability in different functional skills. A parent may be exceptional with numbers and understanding money and time, but may have great difficulty with social skills and managing their child's behavior.

-adapted from HELPING PARENTS PARENT
S. Heighway, WI Council on Developmental
Disabilities

STRENGTHS

Cognitive limitations do not prevent a person from having many good skills, behaviors and abilities. Strengths could be many, examples are:

Nurturing. Great affection has been displayed with their children. Hugs, attention, and praise resulting in positive attachment.

Ability to seek and use help; develop positive relationships with others. It takes courage and openness to allow people/"professionals" into one's home. Building the relationship can be mutually satisfying. Many parents can develop trust in others.

Ability to form and make a long term commitment to relationships. Long marriages or partner relationships where couples cope with stress and struggles and see it through.

Recognizing a need for help. Seeking out support. Knowing the need but not necessarily how to resolve problem.

VALUES AND BELIEFS - FOUNDATIONS

Families have strengths and can change. They deserve respect. Families have wisdom and solutions. Families and communities are our best resource.

Strengths are what ultimately resolve issues of concern. It is important to set up opportunities for families to show their strengths.

Strengths are discovered through listening, noticing, and paying attention to people.

Strengths are enhanced when they are acknowledged and encouraged.

People gain a sense of hope when they are listened to. People are more inclined to listen to others if they are listened to.

Options are preferable to advice. Advice is basically disrespectful . Options provide choices. Choices empower, advice dis-empowers.

Empowering people is preferable to controlling them.

A consultant is more helpful to people than a boss. It is important to remember, we work with and for the family, the family does not work for us.

OUR SENSE OF SELF

As “**professionals**” working with families headed by parents with special needs we must recognize what we bring to the relationship.

Our relationship with one parent may differ greatly from that of another. To better understand our choice to work in this field, and what we bring to the relationship, we might ask ourselves the following questions:

What experiences have I had with people with cognitive limitations? How do my experiences affect my **emotions, attitudes, and expectations**?

What are my **values** and **attitudes** about the **adequacy** of parenting?

How far will I go in providing support when parents are having difficulties? Where do I stand on the **spectrum of attitudes** on who should or should not be a parent?

What are their **values about lifestyles** (ie. food, hygiene, money) that are different from my own? Can children grow up healthy in these lifestyles?

What do I do when I feel **challenged** by a parent? How do I respond when a parent doesn't agree with me or refuses to carry out a task?

Who do I go to for **emotional and work related support**?

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THE RELATIONSHIP

The relationship you develop with the family is crucial to your success in helping. We each have our own “bag of tricks”, listed are some additional approaches.

First, **do no harm**. Be careful your helping does not overwhelm the family.

All parents deserve **courtesy and understanding**. Don't talk down, assume these adults are your peers.

Use a straight forward “**down to earth**” approach. Avoid jargon, use simple understandable words.

Use a **positive** approach - find the things going right, not always wrong.

Empathize with the family regardless of how well they're doing. “Being a parent is a hard job.”

Don't be **judgemental** about what is in a parent's environment. ie. big screen TV.

Share your own experiences, both positive and negative. Let your humanness show through. Allow the parents to know you as a “**person**”, not only as a ~**professional**”.

Maintain a sense of humor, **balanced** with serious concern, and empathy.

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